

Memo

To: Education Committee
From: Robert J. Brothers, Jr., Executive Director
Date: March 11, 2011
Re: SB 1138, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STRENGTHENING OF
SCHOOL BULLYING LAWS

The Commission **supports** SB 1138, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STRENGTHENING OF SCHOOL BULLYING LAWS, but will respectfully suggest two changes to the bill as drafted.

CHRO just last month sent a letter to all superintendents of schools, high school principals and president of local PTA/PTOs to make clear that bullying based on race, color, religious creed, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ancestry, present or past history of mental disability, mental retardation, learning disability or physical disability is illegal under Connecticut law.

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) along with the State Department of Education has concurrent jurisdiction over complaints of discrimination based on the protected classes listed above. While Connecticut law is co-extensive with Federal law in many respects, Connecticut law includes far more protected classes than does Federal law.

Bullying has made children the victims of relentless mental, physical and other harassment. Bullying is intrusive, invasive, oppressive and diminishes the quality of the bullying victim's educational experience. It unquestionably affects the victim's educational performance, and the future of the victim and the bully. Unregulated, the victims are compelled to return to the scene of the bullying conduct each day to submit to more. Children should not have to dread or find ways of avoiding having to go to school each day to avoid bullying. Families should not have to remove their children from schools that refuse to provide protection against bullying.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS TO THE BILL

1) In Section 1, (a)(1)(A) now reads Causes physical or emotional harm to another student or damage to another student's property. We would suggest the language be amended to read Causes physical, emotional **OR MENTAL** harm to another student or damage to another student's property. We believe the

inclusion of mental would more effectively communicate dire long-term effects of bullying.

2) Section (b) requires the Department of Education to designate the fourth Wednesday in January in each year to be Safe School Awareness Day, which day shall be suitably observed in all the public schools of the state as a day to increase public awareness of the effects of bullying, to encourage students to not use hurtful names and to promote tolerance and respect for differences among students across the state. To be truly effective CHRO believes this effort should occur at the beginning of the school year rather than half way through the school year after patterns of bullying and its ramifications have been established.